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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [UZ](#)
SUBJECT: PRE-ELECTION TOUR FOR KARIMOV?

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[1](#)B. 06 TASHKENT 02017

Classified By: CDA BRAD HANSON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: President Karimov traveled unusually far afield in May and June, possibly in anticipation of an expected reelection campaign. Independent press speculation suggests that the Uzbek president will seek reelection, possibly by amending the Uzbek Constitution to allow him to run for a third term. Others speculate some legal ruling will be finagled explaining away a third term for the president. Karimov's recent travels can be seen as a pre-election effort to improve his public image and solidify his support outside of Tashkent. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) In the six weeks between May 17 and June 22, President Karimov crisscrossed Uzbekistan, traveling to six of the country's 14 provinces. The presidential visits generally followed the same script in Karakalpakstan, Khorezm, Bukhara, Navoi, Namangan, and Andijon. Karimov toured each province's major economic enterprises and public works projects and gave managers and local officials instructions on further development. The president hosted meetings with farmers, workers, students, and children, who described local conditions, discussed their concerns, and expressed gratitude and enthusiasm for Karimov's leadership. Each visit also included at least one speech on a public policy issue, such as economic development, independence in international affairs, or national culture.

[1](#)3. (U) Karimov made efforts to reach out to specific constituencies during his travels, including senior clerics in Bukhara, ethnic Tajiks in Navoi, women in Namangan, and farmers in each of the regions. He even praised the residents of Andijon for "standing firm" during Uzbekistan's "national tragedy". Uzbek national television covered each trip extensively, beginning with a morning bulletin on Karimov's arrival at the regional airport and finishing with an hour-long special program summarizing the visit a few days later. According to state-controlled media, the trips were inspection tours allowing Karimov to evaluate the progress of local infrastructure construction projects and the provinces' overall social and economic development.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Internet news media, however, speculated that the visits are the beginning of the president's reelection campaign. Independent internet reports point to the conspicuous absence of major local personnel changes that typically characterize Karimov's visits to the provinces (Note: The hokim of Andijon City was replaced July 4, but this appears to have been unconnected to the presidential visit. End Note.) According to NBCentral Asia, Karimov's trips have been dominated to an unusual degree by populist

events apparently designed to improve the president's public image. The website "Muslim Uzbekistan" theorizes that Karimov is seeking to gauge the political mood of the countryside and bolster his popularity before proposing changes to Uzbek election law that would allow him to serve another term. (Comment: Uzbekistan's Constitution requires that changes to the basic election law, such as one allowing the President to run for a third term, must be made "within six-months of the election and following wide discussion." In the opinion of at least one local lawyer, this provision easily can be interpreted as allowing changes to the Constitution and the basic law right up until the election itself. End Comment.)

15. (SBU) President Karimov was elected to a second term in office on January 9, 2000. The Uzbek Constitution currently limits Presidents to two seven-year terms (ref A). Nevertheless, most credible Uzbekistan watchers believe Karimov intends to remain in office. Speculation is rife as to how Karimov may plan to portray his retention of power as being in conformity with the Uzbek Constitution; many observers believe that an amendment to the Constitution allowing the President to run for additional terms is the most likely scenario (ref B). Others believe a court or Parliamentary determination may be made interpreting the referendum and Constitution change extending the President's term from five to seven years as also somehow setting back the clock on the number of terms, allowing Karimov to run, in effect, for a third term, but, in name, as a first term under the new extended term decided in 2000.

16. (C) Comment: Karimov's tour looks to us like a pre-election tour designed to remind people of his successes as President of Uzbekistan. Interestingly, Karimov mostly

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chose to visit regions of the country that he travels to less frequently, indicating perhaps that he is unsure of his support in those regions. As "Muslim Uzbekistan" speculates, Karimov may seek to amend the Constitution to allow him to seek reelection, possibly by abolishing term limits altogether. We might therefore expect an amendment of the term-limits law to be introduced and adopted by the Oliy Majlis sometime before September 23, the date when, according to the Constitution, some announcement on the Presidential elections, expected December 23, must be made. Karimov would likely announce his candidacy soon afterward. In other scenarios, another referendum may be held on extending his current term as President, a court ruling or Parliamentary resolution made interpreting away the two-term limit, or the Parliament may seek to anoint him as "President for Life." HANSON